

Interview with A. H. Rashkin on National Freight Pact

Male

The world at 10.

Voice:

Dwight Martin:

Good evening, I'm Dwight Martin. We will discuss the contract victory of Jimmy Hoffa's Teamsters with A. H. Rashkin, labor specialist for the *New York Times*. Jimmy Hoffa won what he and many others consider his greatest victory as a labor leader today. A nationwide contract involving almost half a million drivers and helpers. Others outside the Teamsters fear the new contract will give even more power to this controversial Union figure. We have invited A. H. Rashkin, the *New York Times* labor specialist, and a longtime observer of Hoffa's career, to join us tonight to discuss the impact of this contract on labor and on the country as a whole. Good evening, Abe.

A. H. Rashkin:

Night, Dwight.

Dwight Martin:

I wonder if you could tell me briefly, just what your reactions to this new contract are.

A. H. Rashkin:

Well Dwight, I'm not sure that it's quite as cataclysmic as many observers feel, you know, that we have had in steel and coal many other industries, industrywide patterns in the transportation industry and the railroads. We've had them and of course when very recently we were threatened with a nationwide strike, as we may be again next month. Congress stepped in and passed a compulsory arbitration law to prevent any disruption of transportation from imperiling the national welfare in the shipping industry. There's been a good deal of fear on the part of congressmen that the multiplicity of contracts results in a lot of whip sawing which is very damaging to the security of the nation. So what Jimmy Hoffa has done here makes a good deal of sense economically. What worries people, and I must say I share the apprehension in this area, is that Jimmy Hoffa never has demonstrated any enormous sense of social responsibility and so when you put all the trucking in the nation under his command and give him the potential when it suits his purpose to call a nationwide strike you worry about whether there will be adequate restraint. Now, of course, Jimmy's answer to that is that he wouldn't be stupid enough to call a nationwide strike, because that would immediately invite retaliation by Congress that so that you have kind of the situation that would exist or that does exist in terms of the use of the atomic bomb or the hydrogen bomb. It's just the prospect is just so terrifying that everybody recoils in horror from it. On the other hand, this when the power exists, as it clearly does with this nationwide agreement, there is not only the ability to use it, but the danger that at some point it will be used.

Dwight Martin:

What about the reaction of some economic specialists quoted earlier on the probable cost increase in the trucking industry itself?

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A. H. Rashkin: Well, I think there are two very serious points of concern. One is that given a nationwide agreement that the Union does have the power, the leverage to push up costs and you remember that initially Jimmy Hoffa projected demands it would have cost about \$600 million. Now this came as a surprise to the industry because they felt that with recognizing that there was a great deal of public apprehension that Jimmy would make his cost, uh, his asking price, a moderate one that the important thing for him was to get everything into one package and then having got that leverage to exert some real muscle to get a very substantial package. He settled for roughly half of what he asked for. The price is a high one, but it's not extraordinarily high, even though it will undoubtedly be reflected in higher trucking costs, which the nature of trucking being what it is since it touches every industry. This will tend to percolate through the economy and will be reflected in the cost of living for all of us to some extent, but in terms of even the guidelines of the old Kennedy administration, which presumably will be reaffirmed by the Johnson administration, this wasn't a very out of line agreement it was on the high side, but not fantastically high. Now, however, having got the nationwide pattern established, which there is reason to fear that the next time around this course is 3 years off and what with all the legal encumbrances hanging over Jimmy Hoffa, perhaps he won't be here three years from now. Or at least he won't be here in terms of making the contract. But if he is sure, there is a very real danger that this will be an expensive contract. In terms of the other aspect of fear, namely that there will be a nationwide strike which would paralyze the country, which would have a very damaging and very quick effect on the whole transportation lifeline of the country. There is some warrant for believing that Hoffa would do what he always has done, namely divide and conquer. Pick a few strategic operators, strike them, and let the rest operate. But of course, that is not an ironclad guarantee, even assuming that that's what he would do. Because if the employers react, as many employers have done in those situations, and as you can remember, the New York publishers did do when the printers union struck four of the newspapers and allowed five, to operate. The other five, recognizing that whatever settlement was negotiated would be binding on them, decided that they would voluntarily shut down. Now the trucking operators, confronted with a parallel situation, knowing that Hoffa is picking some to force, under competitive pressure, a higher settlement than he could otherwise get may voluntarily elect to shut down so that even though Hoffa does not call a nationwide strike, the end result might be very much the same, and you would have the nationwide paralysis, which we fear so in that sense. I would not minimize it. It's more important in transportation than it is in steel or than it was in coal in the days when we had nationwide coal strikes. You can go a long time before a steel and coal strike exerts a really throttling, suffocating effect on the economy

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when trucks stop, when railroads stop, when shipping stops, the impact is much, much more speedy.

Dwight Martin: What do, before we get into any discussion of some of Mr. Hoffa's legal encumbrances, what do you think the effect of this contract is on his stature as a labor leader?

A. H. Rashkin: Well, there's no question that, both in terms of the of his position within the Teamsters and in terms of what already is a disturbingly great feeling in labor generally, that it was a terrible mistake to expel the Teamsters that Jimmy Hoffa, whatever his deficiencies, is a man who gets results, and that in a period when labor does show many signs of stagnation, that this kind of vigorous, militant leadership is what you need. This is certainly going to be a demonstration, both in terms of having taken this dog eat dog industry and tied it all together in a nationwide agreement. Taken what was essentially a baronial union and forced all the local potentates and the vice president's, even though there's still some pockets of resistance, by and large Hoffa knocked them all down. He got the industry in line so that this really tends very substantially to build up the image of Hoffa the irresistible.

Dwight Martin: Well, now Jimmy Hoffa's biggest and most outspoken enemy, Attorney General Robert Kennedy is in Japan on a foreign policy mission right now. But meanwhile, I assume that the mills of justice are grinding toward Jimmy Hoffa in his various entanglements. Just what is his status right now?

A. H. Rashkin: Well Dwight, there's no question that as far as Bobby Kennedy is concerned, there's an implacable determination to get Jimmy Hoffa in the belief that he is really an enemy of the of the total population that in the national interest, it's important to remove him from a position of leadership in the trade union movement and the and the Teamsters Union even before this agreement, with our biggest, strongest, most powerful union with the greatest economic leverage. Now, there is currently an, and Hoffa, now with this great victory behind him, has to go on to Chattanooga next Monday to stand trial on a jury fixing charge. He has seemed a good deal more worried about that than many other charges in the past, or than other charges which will confront him if he gets past this one.

Dwight Martin: At what state is this trial now? Does he go on trial in Chattanooga?

A. H. Rashkin: He goes on trial, all the delaying motions have apparently been knocked out, except Hoffa does have 9 lives in this field, so until he goes on trial nobody can be sure.

Dwight Martin: Well, we'll have to wait and see how many of them he's used up by then. Thank you, A. H. Rashkin of the New York Times. This is Dwight Martin saying good night for the world at 10.

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